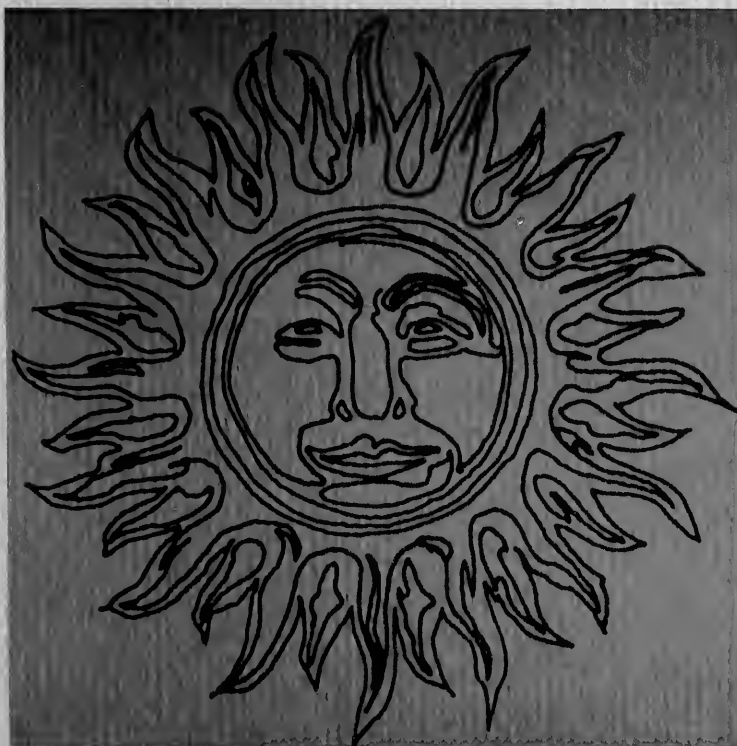


Aubade



1979

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AUBADE
1979

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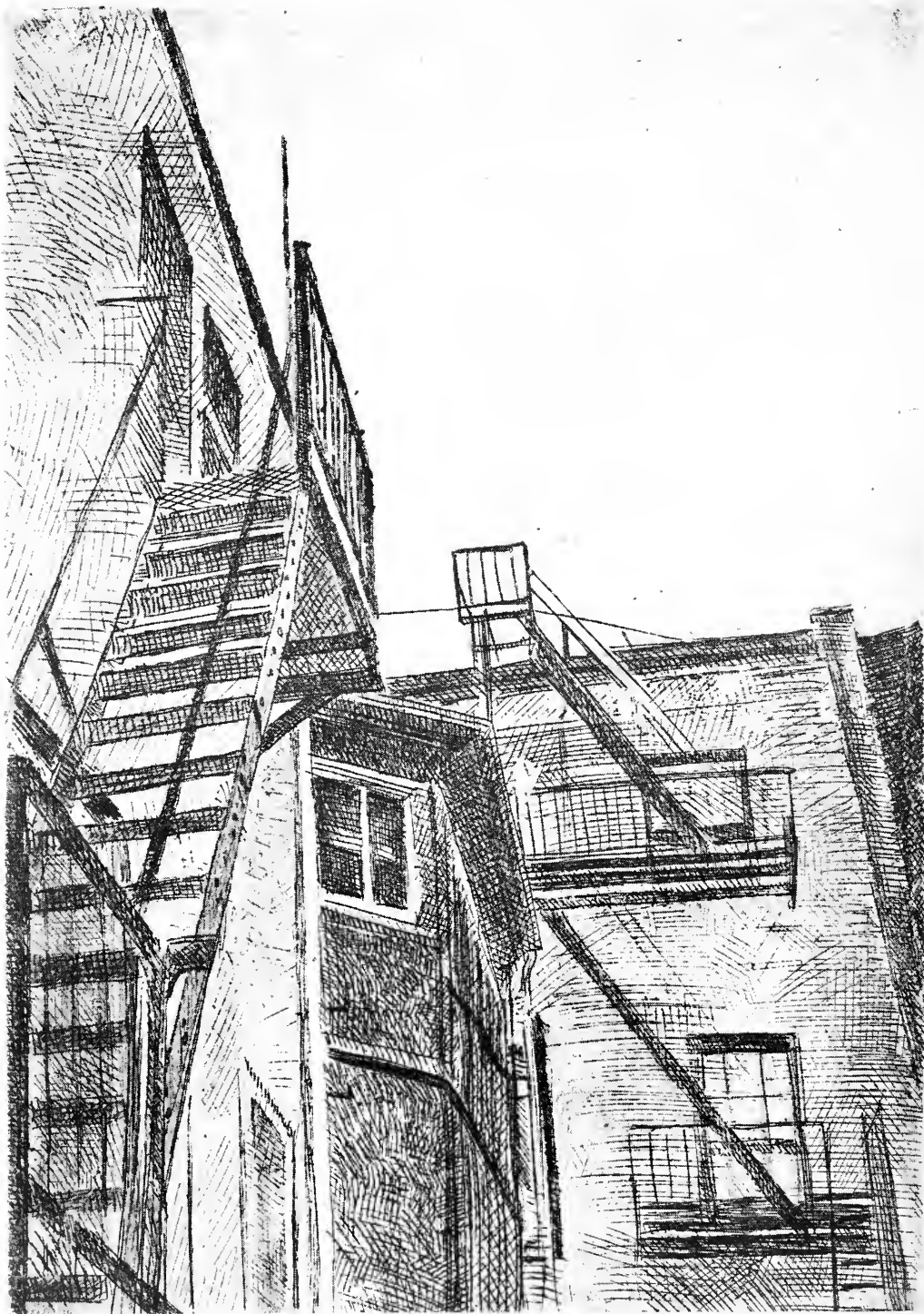
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Montine Jordan

Words A Thing

words

too frail a thing
to build upon
but strong to bring
a structure down
or body
to its feet

harsh do carry
one's cursed soul
to all-inclusive hell
yet tender bring
the lover
to his knees

light enough
that sounds
are carried off
by sultry breeze
yet cruel enough
to scar the strongest
heart

eerie tales that
scare the child
that make adult minds
think

loud enough
that deaf men listen
quiet still
that silent speak

hushed

profound that
make the glacial
movement

and sad that make
the weary weep.

Ann Lindsey

Dawn

Pink orange purple
Dawn spreads her lacy fingers
Darkness in retreat

Brightest gleaming gold
Rarest treasure free to all
Sunset on water

Cavalry of foam
Charging on castles of sand
The tide rushing in

Christine Ann Mallgraf

Dragonflies

Tiny dragonflies
Beauty traveling in pairs
Sequins on the pond

Breezy peach blossoms
Spirals of wind blown whirlpools
Dance for their delight

Elizabeth Page Palmer

Fog

Warm fog creeps
across cold ebony water
in billowy white.

Like a smoker's pipe lit
the flickering white
jumps
from its source -
the swan
a whiter white
upon the clean fog...

Its partner lost in the mist
paddles to and fro
hours later
the screen of white
falls down
down

Into a bluer sea
unveiling
a speck of light.

Distant
the call from afar
remains unheard
until
the speck becomes a feathered mass
of joy dancing
across the lake,

Webbed feet
under water
over fog
Together.

Meredith Pierce





Cathy Beach

Asparagus

Thin, delicate tendrils,
pale green sprigs,
flowing,
curling,
entwining
like reaching, grasping fingers
yearning to touch again.

Resa Cirrincione

I Am 'Ere Amunxt

i am 'ere amunxt de auld mens
an de chilluns
wootr flows down outa de garden
an de jasmine blossoms a'birthin sum
reeel kute flowahz
i am the blossom where de worms make dere home.
blossom (i) fallin from de tree
to cling to de car tops an
de windshields, makin
a muk o'thangz.

Catherine E. France

Spider

Silently at work
this little one
escapes all but
wandering eyes.
Completely inconspicuous,
hiding its ugliness,
welcoming dampness.
Shuns the light but
thrives in corners
of darkness.
Though a hunter he is not,
he remains a deft trapper.
Sheltered in his
silken home
feasting on the fate
of others.

Daven Rene

Sweet Flower

Sweet, sweet flower of my heart
The fragrance of the dawn.
I breath your love and then I start,
Like carefree children laughing on the lawn,
To rise and fall and skip the rope
Of gentle air through full moon pines.
When purged with passion and with hope
My poet's mind sings lofty lines
Of nights and mornings you have filled
With woman's warmth; a flowing light.
The song the nightingale has trilled.
And from the visions of my heart, the night
Our pleasure dome, has softly turned to day
And my mind cries what only my heart can say.

F.A. Straley

Just One More Time

it's dawn just now
as i gaze by my side
and wonder who you are
your arms are strong and bronzed
you wear a gold chain that leapt
hysterically onto my breasts.....
only a few hours ago.....
shall we drink black coffee and
eat some toast for breakfast?
then take a stroll in kelvingrove park
or, shall you slip quickly out of bed
and leave without a look or nod.....
then i shall pretend to be asleep as
you glide through the door.....
alone again - until
tonight perhaps.

Sandra Staas



Jeanine Hewitt



Alice McKinney

Sonnet

If I should chance to have a friend, a word,
And pen, perhaps they're all I need...Well off,
So far, a lucky man. A man's swift love
Like others' lives is flightier than a bird's.
A brownish wren, though small, knows more of love
Than simple men - know habits, nesting times,
To search for food to feed the young. Lies, rhymes,
And tales are not its call nor sung above.
If I should chance to cage this wary bird,
If I should chance to sing or make songs heard,
Then love should chance to find no more the bird,
But womankind. And I should think few words,
The simpler kind, could but describe the way
I'll sing my song. In all, love has its say.

Ann Lindsey

American Free Enterprise

Sombody gave your sister a cat. She
Strokes it gently, telling you not to
Touch. You and your sister were the
Best of friends. But when she goes to
Sleep, you plan to steal into her room,
Foreclose on the cat, and choke out
All of her peaceful dreams.

Mark Madigan

That Day

It was my birthday; and I was nine.
But I was locked in the bathroom
Of an Amtrak train.
I thought I would be there
My whole life.

Mark Madigan

It's Over Now

We were standing around the punchbowl
At my Sister's wedding,
When I recalled a photograph:
She and I were sharing a tub.
But it's over now,
She'll share that nakedness
With someone else.

Mark Madigan

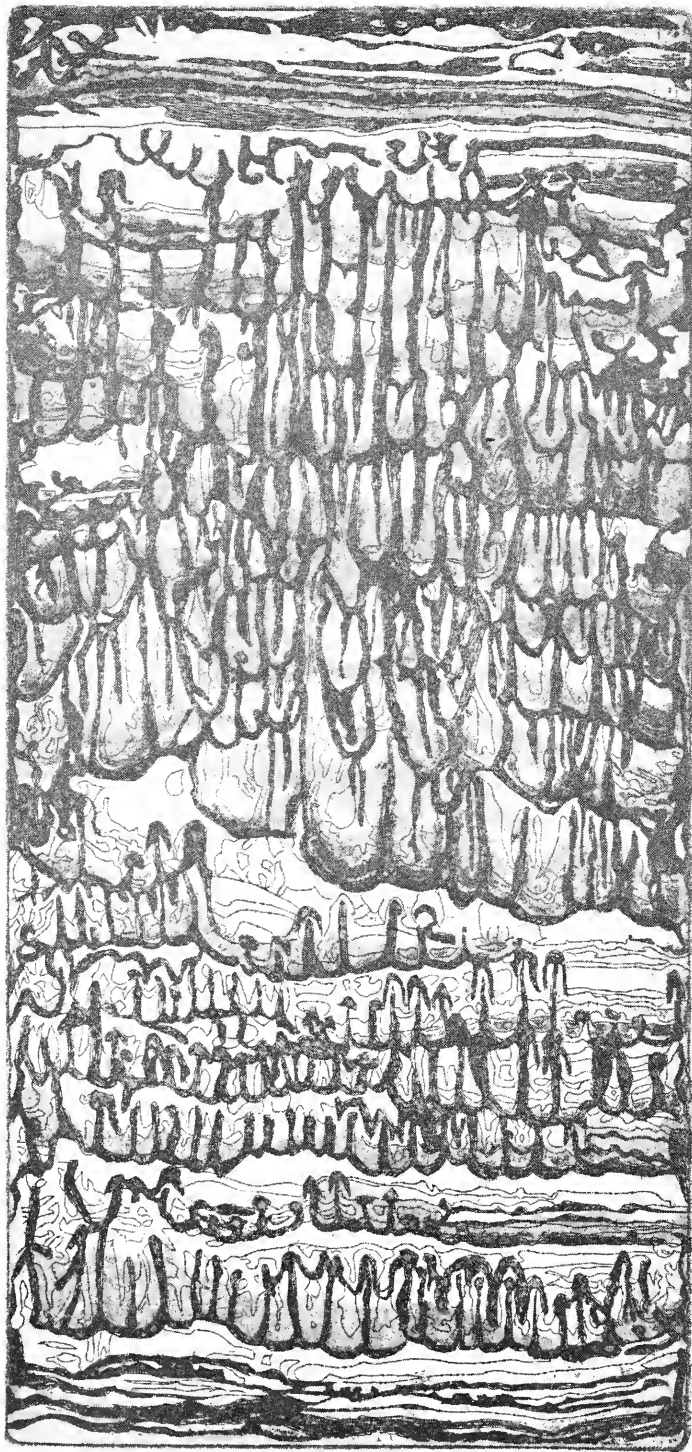
My Father

His name is Arnold, and he's fat.
And Once, he walked to the swimming pool
In his tee-shirt, and his Sunday shoes
Without any socks.
I hope no one saw him.

Mark Madigan



Mary Cate



Candle

One candle absorbing the night
or saturating it
halted only by the walls,
seeping and softening even the corners
of their cubeness
and angles of bookcase, bed, and bureau
and niches of open closet
brimmed with night
then doubling itself in mirror,
affecting the same in chamber's twin,

One candle creating a texture
which so affects even the flowers in the frame
and the flowers in the vase,
pretending pastels of all,
envelops and mellows the pulse of clock,
oozes with evening's cologne and the musings
by one in recess
in fetus-morning.

Kimberly Dodson

The Fish

I can see the silent flicker
Of a fish inside his looking glass,
Circling his future
And returning to his past.

I can hear a quiet click
Sounding from my unlocked door,
In the shadow where I lay waiting
Nervous time presses no more.

I sense the strange vibrations
When calloused hands tend to roam,
And the fish continues circling
In his silent glass bound home.

Elizabeth Page Palmer

Cold New England Heart

Fallen Autumn's leaves
gave crackling life
to Winter's minty air
and set the icy stage
for the birth
of a Vermont raised child.

The slap of tender skin
was quieted by
the hush
of falling snow
and the wailing ceased
as chill set in
to conquer the heart
of the new blue babe.

The drifts piled higher
higher
like stacks
of clean surgical gauze
and all emotion was lost.
Northern conservatism
allowed no cries of agony
no tears of joy.

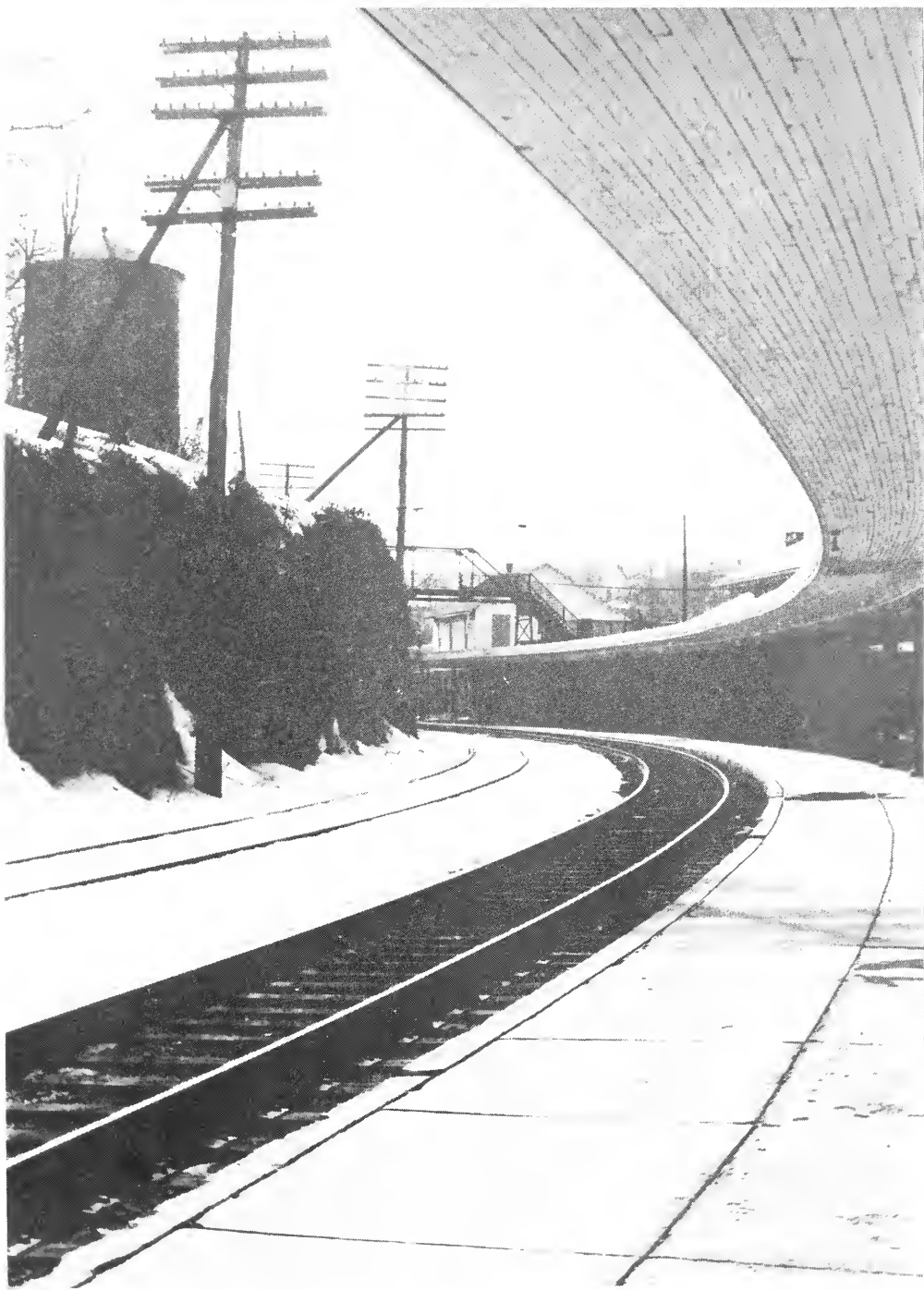
She lived her life
in work
hoeing the hardened soil
shovelling the white masses
labors that calloused her hands
as well as her heart.

The marriage was a convention
taken with little rapture
inside the grey
stone walls
of a Protestant church.
Her three sons
were born
with no tears of joy,
no cries of agony -
two the image of herself,
the other who would dare
to find the warm, leave Vermont, fall in love,
be forgotten.

She remembered him one day
just before
her heart hardened
like cold crystal
and like ice on a wet tongue--
stopped...

A lone man turned from the grave
just as the summer sun
sunk into the earth.
Sorry.

Meredith Pierce



Montine Jordan



Alice McKinney

**To Depict Wind
—for ron baker**

wind
blown brown by dust swiftly by blowing dust brown,
rags waving free from arms as arms gather at them,
the rags body-bound,
the body,
crust of recollected thoughts about
the mouth,
lipping sand as words return as sounds slipping
in.
teething the grit. choosing dirt to depict earth.
with eye cast down
where pity over grasses lies engrossed,
moving if rocked by winds breathing.
and humbled and bent, and whispering.
while the forest of a tree falls in upon itself
where branches bend and burst the
bits of stem and twig as
wind,
freedom raging in the limbs.

Shannon Elder

Amazing Grace

Say of nothing: It is mine.

Say only: It is with me.

The children never would have known
but for the whispers at the fellowship hour,
little clumps of people gathered
in the churchyard after the service.

We cant have a man like that teaching our children,
as if every male one of them
didn't feel lust when Nonnie Towler
opened her legs to squeeze the organ pedals.

At least he did the right thing, some conceded,
the skinny, ascetic Minister of Music
and his thin-necked, round-eyed wife with the high false voice
who, even after the hasty marriage
still had that virginal look.

But the sermons changed after the baby came
in six months,
weighing an undeniable seven pounds
From the pulpit no longer love and forgive
the signboard now read *Outreach and Tithe*.

Religions get lost as people do
and one week after the birth of the child,
the chair sat empty beside the preacher
and the choir sang Amazing Grace unconduted.

Leslie Wells



Jeanine Hewitt



Montine Jordan

Exploits Of A Swimmer

The coved beach spread like a small fan, painted yellow-white, as though its lacquered finish had aged in the winters of splintered ice - when the surface water linked up with the shore and pretended land under the guise of drifted snow.

An early spring had come, slushing the grip of winter, pulling at the under current like wind in heavy clouds. The water cleared, the sun probed the surface and caught the flash of silvered fish, warming them, causing their mouths to gasp in red. The sun melted the lacquer off the beach, turning the sand a gleaming, sparkling white, so that the surrounding trees and their green depth of forest fell back from the beach as soft grass around a bright, little pebble.

Out on the water rode a train of cylindrical floats, linked together on the perimeter of the safe zone. It was here, just past the perimeter, that someone had drowned. When it happened, the lifeguard and concerned participants formed a line, arm to arm, stretched the length of the swimming area. They advanced slowly, feet afraid of the bottom, moving so slowly until someone kicked it. The stupid color of her swimsuit caused one to cry out.

They came down to the small, dark beach and looked out across to the other shore. Again, silence. Again the calm, still water. They shed their clothes and left them crumpled in the cool sand.

A canoe passed them. Two old men leaned over and looked into the water, then straightened up and went on, with pipes lit. They swam next to a barge but did not board. They became tired and lay on the surface, looking up at the night sky for distinguishable formations. Some drifted apart in imagined explosion, others fought amongst themselves in the black expanse. One fell down into the water, blinking with light, floundering in the desperation of death. And they swam to it, and he caught it up and placed it on his head, and he kept it there until they had reached shore.

—it was an attempt to span the water with light. it exhibited a blind courage, cleverly contained within the white crystalline drop of its heavy descent. was its fall a search for salvation?

The bearded fellow looked over at his friend. "It will only end up in the web of some spider."

"Good. Then I have saved the life of a spider." They laughed together and shook their heads and then grew quiet. "Some night I feel you will be able to see her."

"Where there is a moon?"

"When there is no moon." From the out-stretched hand a small light blinked on. It was flickering sporadically as it passed up into the darkness, and became invisible when it joined other tiny flickering lights.

"Are you feeling sleepy?"

"No." they exchanged a momentary glance. "lights up there, and then look, down here in the water also. Reflection."

"What are you saying?"

"It doesn't matter."

"Tell me anyway."

"I just did. It doesn't matter where the light, but the light." There was silence then. He bent down and made some marks in the sand with his finger, his friend watching.

"Don't tell me, I don't want to know what it says."

"Alright." He stood up then and gazed out over the surface. "The little waves will carry this to her."

"There are no little waves. There is no moon."

"No, there is no moon. I wonder..."

"Yes?"

"What it is like down there."

"Wet. It is wet down there."

"You know, I think on her always, returning to, never leaving."

"My beard is dripping, just like the hairs of a cunt."

He was silent. He could not laugh. He looked down at his toes, half buried in the wet sand. He looked up at his friend's face and had to smile, "Yes, your beard is dripping. Is the water sweet?"

"I am sad to report that it is but wet." They filled their mouths with water, and laughing, let the liquid drop drooling from between their lips and down the chin.

(cont.)

The canoe passed by again, far away near the opposite shore. One small light could be made out in the distance, a flashlight or the flame of a match. Then it went out, the canoe disappeared into blackness. They entered the water again and made the long swim across.

He rolled over on his back then and sat up, scratching at his beard, grains of sand falling out. "You gave me a little scare out there, you know."

"I did?"

"You were under a long time. I saw your feet disappear and waited for you to come up again. I waited. I thought something..."

"Nothing happened. I was just practising holding my breath."

"Yeah, so was I."

"Sorry." Their faces turned to look for the other, the shadowy outline of each. But their eyes did not meet and had become lost in the darkness. And then he saw him standing up, putting on his clothes. "You are leaving them?"

"Yes." There was a moments silence and then, "what were you thinking about?"

"I wasn't."

"Of course you were. What was it, the stars, the firefly, or her?"

"Nothing. I wasn't thinking about anything."

"Anything sensible you mean." When he looked for some sign, some acknowledgement from him, he saw only the attitude of quiet belligerence spread across his friend's face. "Alright, suture yourself."

His laughter came automatically. "You will come by tomorrow won't you?"

He was silent for a moment. "Sure. Goodnight."

"It has been good hasn't it?" They looked first at one another, and then out to the water. It was calm, still.

"Yes it has. Goodnight."

"You too."

He left then. He walked away from the beach, into the trees. He scratched at his beard. It was itching. It was possible he might shave it off.

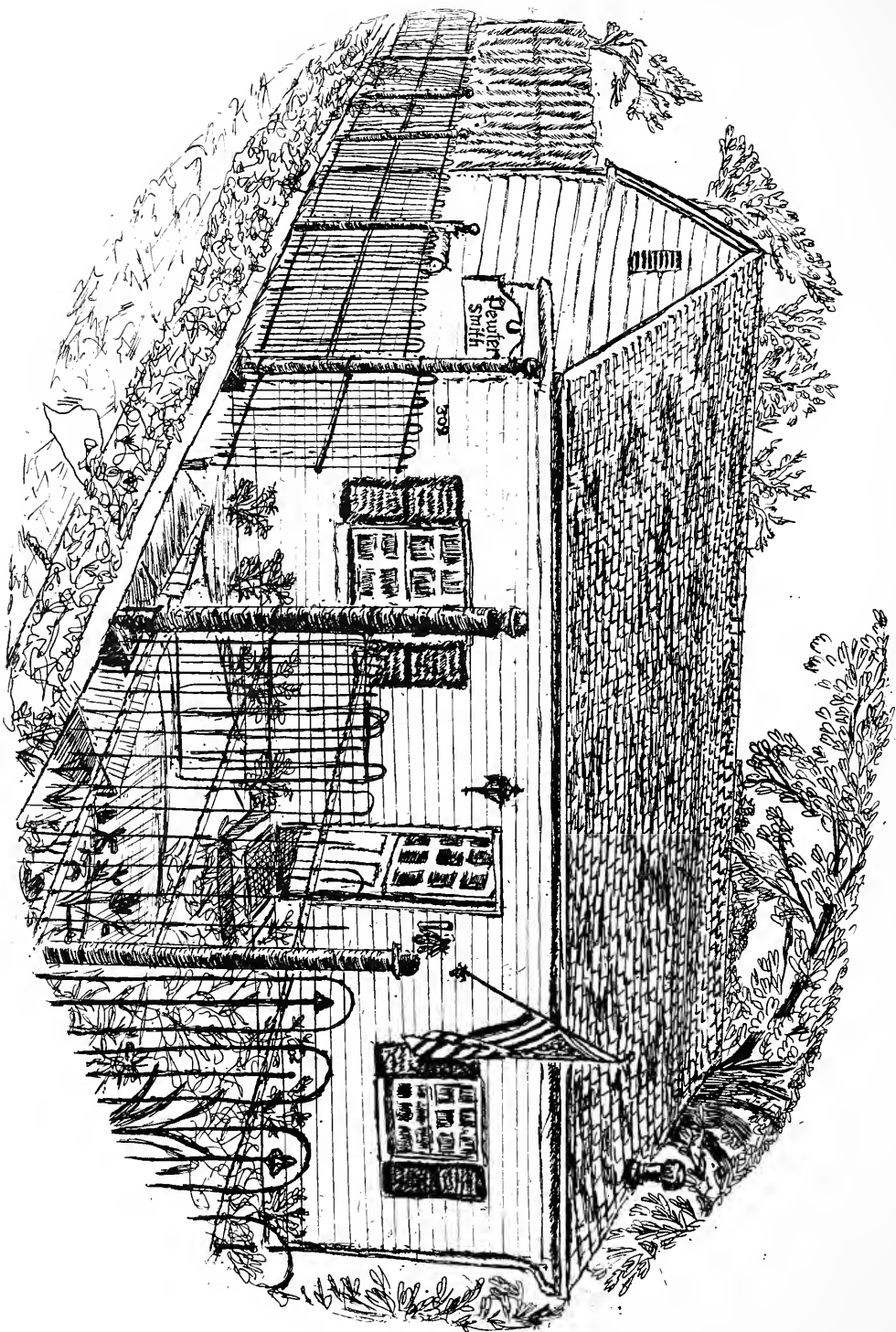
—it was an attempt to create some viable action. was it courage that convinced the act? it is something one cannot be saved from.

The coved beach spread like a small fan, locked open, flat. The lines of sled runners cut across it, heading out towards the frozen surface, pulled by swift, runnered feet. Lines of scarved faces flashed by, bodies connected to bodies, arms in arms, a daring train which avoided narrowly, the cracks and holes in that crust of icy ground.

He came down to the small, white beach and looked out across to the other shore. Again, silence. Again the calm, the stillness. The ice, crystalline in the beard, shook out in tiny white flakes when his mouth opened suddenly wide.

Shannon Elder





First Grandchild

Fragile one,
the joy of the cold days
enters. We have no say.
These days numb forests and cause clutched palms.
Wind will not sleep
When dry brown balms the earth.

But chimneys blaze and white calms
and this season will bring birth.

Leaves hang waiting now
and you, in your wait,
will join us for the first snow.
We love the season,
we have no reason,
and we will love you also.

Kimberly Dodson

Put Off The Greaves

Put off the greaves and sollerets, m'lord;
Day is done, and you've no need of their defense.
Away from the strife, the chevalier can afford
A brief respite from the malevolence
Of those who would hack away at his base.
Breastplate and hanging tasse, thwarterns of violence
To the heart and privates, you may unlace;
No sharp arrow searches within the keep.
Now inside the stone, put aside the iron face
Of the visor veiling the tears as you weep.
The once-shining now rests in its corner, rusting,
While the naked gallant sinks into fitful sleep.

Robert Graves

Love You

The essence of your
 words
 comes slowly
to my senses
 like the
 fragrance
of fresh gingerbread
 waltzing through the
 house.

Anonymous

For The First Time

Standing on the coast
I find myself caught up
in the tide
letting the waves wash away all thought
so that I may meet you
and speak your name
for the first time.

Dale E. Williams

Unforgiveness

I, in unforgiveness,
 have missed the miracle
 of laughter,
and the beauty of a
 morning
 robed in
 amber ripples
 of awakening.

Anonymous



Cindy Hart



Cathy Beach

Yesterday

yesterday--seems like only
and I want

I, confused
all the things I
cannot ask for
because I need me
for me
for one more day

all around me you
in bottles and candles and
bits of wood
and I want to give
you me but
baskets and brownness
and I think of your
hands that
I love
but I need just
a while
to think and write
to be blue and clear by the water
and green and deep in forests
to season myself
like new denim
until I wear and fade just so

only a while
and then to touch
and I without thinking
because then I will be
mine to give but

I cannot now see me
in bottles and bits
as you have given
for I gather me around me
to hoard and
I cry to be a part of you
but I stop
perhaps my wick burns too
fast maybe just
one
more day

Tutt Stapp

She

She lies sideways on the bed,
listening to the turn of the front door key.

He is home.

She need not look at the orange glow
of the clock.

It's long past the midnight hour.

He crosses between
the bedroom door and bath.

She hears the click of the light switch,
 rushing and splashing water,
 the roar of the toilet.

he comes in quietly,
Struggles to remove his evening attire
making no effort to fold his trousers,
or hang his jacket on the back of the chair.

She feels his weight shift the bed
as he crawls under the linen.

He yawns and scratches his furry chest.

She suppresses her breath until
his breathing becomes regular.

He is safely asleep.

She slowly turns onto her back.

He is snoring.

She stares at the ceiling
and at the fingerlike patterns
that the spider plant leaves on the wall.

Slices of dawn
slip through the pane
filling the room with morning.

He sleeps, she rises.

Elizabeth Page Palmer





Jeanine Hewitt

William Faulkner

Furious scorner of timeless genteel movement
through rooms whispering cunoline and julip;
he threw open back-bedroom doors
exposing the real South, beast with two backs,
its glory fading like dried blood on a corn cob,
its only prophet a soundless idiot,
Reba reborn every time a Southern woman climbed into bed.

Leslie Wells

D.H. Lawrence

A bird man kicked at the heat-baked earth
and drew black blood from barren dust.
Etna smoking in the distance, having carried away its ember,
he set flame licking like serpents' tongues at his lovers.
Quetzalcoatl laughed to see the small being burning with his worship.
Feeling dark blood throb his English veins,
sinuous rod arching into plumed rainbow,
the phoenix beat his wings and rose into the crackling sun.

Leslie Wells

James Joyce

Yes I will begin again,
tears from smoke falling riverrun into the grilling kidney
the great mind piercing back through jotted observation
creating boggling masterwork from drab and piddling habit;
he saw the blooming flower in a balding pubgoer's face
and questing youth in the gull knifing through air
over dead dogsbody on the beach.
Immortalizer of niggling existence,
we owe to you the eternal yes.

Leslie Wells

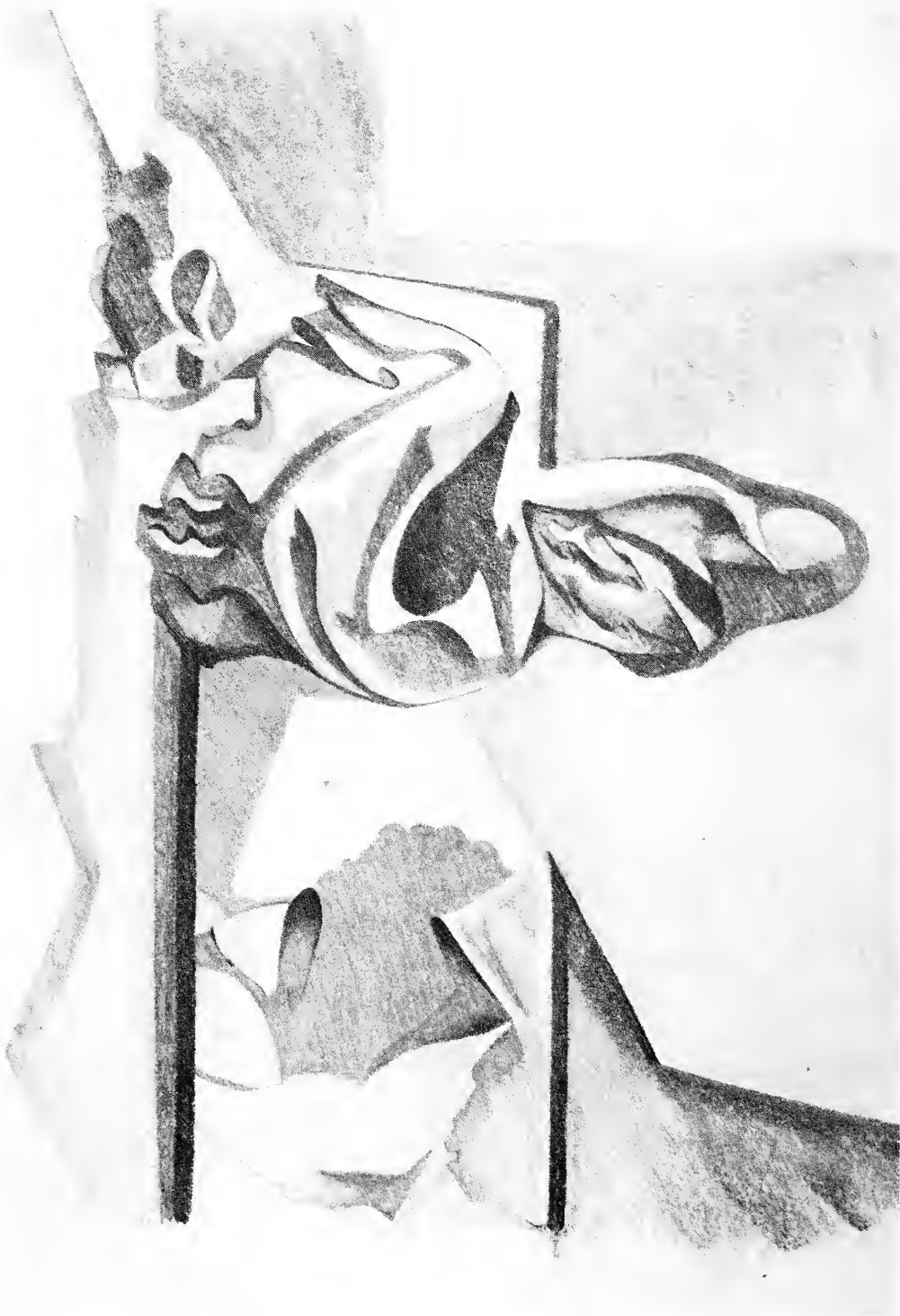
In A Railway Station-Paisley Gilmour, Scotland

SCRAPING SCRATCHING STRINGED

music strummed monotonously through
the grey empty - almost haunting
railway station
an old man minced pitifully back and forth
head shaking each time he spat on the frosty
glowing platform
his shuffling steps mellowed with the
penetrating pathetic
archaic musical chords
yellow lamps gleamed sparingly upon the
black chasm between myself and the battered
circular clock which had stopped, as if all
life had ceased, at ten fifteen
indeed it looked as if all that survived were
my shadow and the shuffle of an old man.

Sandra Staas





Sandra Hall

A Love Poem

the clouds dance at my feet.
the prince and me, we ride
content in there for we
know by their dance
that they are happy
to walk along the pure hair
of my prince,
a norse god,
is as close to bliss as
each strand reaches my feet and soothes
my swollen toes.
the plump feet of the
typi
cal injun maiden.
i seem to end up on the wrong side of the sky
i want his horse to
catch my lace in his hooves
and have
my love and me
topple
through the clouds and to land
safely on rich brown.
we can plant some seeds and hope
that our fruit is ripe and sweet
we can eat our hair and our eyelashes
and if need
be
our eyebrows
to suck the nectar from each
strand, and nestle your face.
we'll swell in the tree caves,
sipping cammomille tea, and share small
spice cakes, wine w/chicory and a bowl
of warm olives.

Catherine E. France

Carousel Syndrome

Crimson ponies dancing
frozen in their stance,
sing silently and comfortably
as they orbit.
It is easy labor within
the grasp of small laughter
and giant gaiety,
amidst unchanging faces,
while keeping perfect beat
with melodies of monotony.
Forty-seven times each sun
they make their charted course
and keep their perfect beat
with melodies of monotony!

But will such stallions ever flee?
Do their wills atrophy
as does the warm breath
of new balloons with age?
When purple plastic fades and wears
and engines rust - what?
When little laughs mature to weariness
and youth seeks industry, not play,
when tunes change
and faces rearrange,
when roads don't all return
in circles...
then will the painted beast canter?

Janet Campbell

Tapping

Repetitive tapping
of Monday night rain
lulls the drone
of city life
to a halt
inside your fingertip
methodically rising and falling
on a sticky countertop
inside an all-night diner
kept in business by
Italian patrons and two dreamers.
Pensive brow crinkled
over baby blues...
a young man thinking
old thoughts
disturbs the wet
and confuses the red-headed waitress
who bustles herself
into kitchen nothingness.
The rain stops.

Meredith Pierce



Debbie Richards



City

Somewhere left of arched stone steeple
pigeons flutter to their perch
pressed by ragged march winds blowing
strained against the vagrant cold.

Beyond the church the wind stiffens
collapsed against the bookstall doors
until some warmer weather stays
the ruthless siege upon the streets.

To the west the sun is ransomed
bound beyond dissolving spire,
wind whipped papers in the alley
disturb the pigeons' anchored sleep.

Ann Lindsey

Rose The Bud

believe

i am tired of hearing
about rose
the rose
rose the bud

i wander if bored by
rose, passion
chablis white.
stomped to deathly pulp by
one of chavez' feet possibly
ridden
w/leprosy.

believe

rose, i'd rather hear
of your erect
thorny stem

a protection factor
to prick the intruding
caterpillar
a'groping up to
that worn through
mess o'petals.

i'd like for

japanese beetles
(hirsute & rocknroll)
to attack your infant scent
so the rose the bud
will topple
only

the erect
thorn agent on
crisp green
endures the deluge.

Catherine E. France





Caroline Livesey

Within The Frame

Coffees were passed around. Guilbert counted the two spoons of sugar that fell into Paula's cup, the spills of cream which turned Michel's a muddy brown. For himself, he managed a pinch of sugar, a droplet of cream. He set the cup down, it was too hot yet, and eased himself back into the comfort of the sofa. "We will have this month's edition out a little late, I'm afraid, but I like it."

Michel put his cup down also. "And my article?"

"We placed it dead center." Guilbert glanced over at Paula, who's eyes looked past him from over the rim of her cup, disguising the feeling of her words.

"And what will your readers think about my article?" Michel had missed, or pretended to have missed, the point of her remark. "An historical study of art, from the standpoint of a painting's true or false depiction of an actual event, is unusual for your magazine, is it not?"

"Oh, I suppose a few of our readers will prefer the paintings represented over your analyses of them. But if anything, I feel it provides us with an interesting view of the meaning or purpose of military art."

"Yes, whether the artist desired to glorify the dubious French victory at Borodino, or intended merely to place Napoleon on the canvas, exactly in relation to his position on the field that day."

Paula's coffee hit the table none too softly, the liquid was thrown over the lip of her cup and dribbled down the side. "What interests me is the life of the common soldier, a man of no outstanding qualities, no feats of bravado, etc., save that he participated in the struggle, later to be entered into the history books without a name, just as he was dragged into the earth, some barren, foreign soil."

Michel was incredulous. "You want more, eh? You would have the biographies of every soldier who fought and died at Borodino researched, written, and then published? Seventy-five thousand monographs?"

"At least passed down through time for each family, for later generations. Think of that soldier, dressed in his colorful uniform, the shiny buttons, the silver and gold braid."

"You're speaking of Kath's watercolors now, aren't you Paula?"

Their eyes met. A look of terror and of fury passed quickly over her face. Michel's look betrayed both a feeling of embarrassment and indignation by his reaction. Guilbert could see that Michel had hurt Paula and himself by his reference. Paula's voice was cool in response.

"They reflect for me that time what your historical treatments fail to show, Michel. Life as it was lived, suffered for. I don't care very much what Bonaparte hoped to achieve in Russia, or what his grand design for Europe was."

Guilbert interrupted them. "Paula, please. I'm sure Michel realizes what you are saying is valid. I feel also that he respects Kath's work. He would not have collaborated with her on his books if he did not. His field is history, ours art. How can we argue for one or the other exclusively?"

(cont.)

"That's all right Guilbert." Michel had risen. "I am not without feeling for you Paula, for your love, or whatever, of Kath's achievements. I continue to admire them. It's only that there is still much work to do, and now, without Kath's help, the task is made that much more difficult." He seemed uneasy, standing there before her. "I'm sorry Paula. Well, I'm leaving now. Thanks for the coffee Guilbert."

He followed Michel to the door, and laid a comforting hand upon his elbow. Michel looked back at him, blankly. Guilbert saw that he was tired now. He closed the door slowly, after Michel had passed into the night air.

Guilbert stood there for a moment, then turned and came back to his coffee. She was no longer seated but lay stretched across the length of the sofa, one hand placed over her eyes. "Guilbert?"

"Yes?" The coffee was cold. He hadn't even touched it.

"Why haven't we heard from her? Its been two years."

He drank a little coffee. "I like to think she is busy with her painting somewhere, too busy to write. Anyway, for Kath, correspondence has always been relatively unimportant."

"Yes, I know. Letters destroy her sense of being in the present. She used to say that having to look elsewhere proved the falsity of one's intentions. Only the immediate surroundings interested her. But we have no idea where her immediate surroundings are anymore." She uncovered her face and stared up at the ceiling. Her eyes glistened. Tears. She blinked at them, and then turned her face to look at him. "Guilbert," she said softly, "I don't know if Kath is alive anymore. I feel that she has died somewhere, alone, in some barren, lonely place."

Her face was sad to look upon. He gazed down into his coffee, the thin line of a stain marked the black liquid's prior level. He could drink no more. "You can't know that, Paula. Kath is clever, she takes care of herself. We would have heard something, anyway."

She sat up suddenly. Their eyes met. "No, Guilbert. Kath is dead." She reached a cigarette from inside her purse and struck two matches, the first having failed to light. When her cigarette was lit, smoke curling slowly from it, she began speaking again, very softly. "Remember my trip to the Southwest last summer? The interviews I brought back?"

"Yes, of course."

"I talked to a number of artists who work out there. Werte, Mez, Cordon, O'Keen. I asked every one of them if they had met or had heard of Kath, tall, dark-haired, a painter. No one could tell me a thing. Then one day, I was in Santa Fe, I happened to be looking through a collection of prints and sketches owned by Walthing. He was passed out on the floor of his studio, the placed smelled so bad. Among the prints I found a sketch by Kath. It wasn't dated, but her 'K' was there. I became quite excited over this find and searched through the entire studio. It was no good waking up Walthing. He was beyond sensibility. I couldn't find anything else in all the mess, but a watercolor hanging in one of his back rooms caught my attention. I wasn't sure at first, it looked like Kath's work, but it was heavy and dark, the colors subdued, muted. The figure of a small child was prominent, yet seemed to fade away into the background, into the thick pines, the enormous boulders. The face of the child, a little girl, the face was expressionless. The eyes, her eyes, were dark, frozen. They looked at nothing."

Shannon Elder

Painless And Forever

The sky is falling
and before I am crushed
I would sing you to sleep
on the grass
moonlight around us, in your eyes
so that your whiteness
may make the passing
sudden, painless and forever.

Dale E. Williams

U.S. Route 1 : 12:00

Hitchhiking the dark
secondary road,
a vain escape of
white line thought.
The pale blue eye
smiles through the mist,
guiding the rainswept wanderer.
Insecure cars splash past
and tail lights fade and die.
The soft, shoulder mud
dampens his despair.
He reflects on the
tin can shells, and turns
to face the rushing glare
knowing he will walk
far tonight.

F.A. Straley

I Love The Way

i love the way my mind computes
the curved thought of this world.
the dreamer sips himself from the sun
to expose
the romantic nature of youth.
my prince sweeps me to a cream
white steed, and spun gold
tosses in the zephyr of
the norseman.

Catherine E. France

Dark Thief

Forty-eight hours ago, she said, from the floor
A lifetime can occur in forty-eight hours,
I thought to myself
I am not brothered in useful ways, I said
Having promised myself
Not to be surprised by this recognition of time.

Ann Lindsey

Moon

Big, round, yellow moon
We all want to reach up
and suck your breast.

Huge concentric journeys,
Mona-Lisa moon
silent, knowing, diligent
the madness comes
take me quickly

Leslie Wells





Kim Rossman

An Answer To Prufrock

They began when young, and hence no smarter,
fumbling hands at the tops of her garters,
he sweating English Leather
in the back seat of the car;
hot nights, her stomach twisting with desire
—until the first time, crowded in a car
she thinking: this couldn't be it not this not it
perished the flame of Kama Sutra.

Her parents like him; he had Opinions
hands, gesticulating at long Sunday dinners
they dated so long she mouthed by heart
every song on the tape-deck of his car;
the families questioned, her parents grew worried,
and then they were married.

*I wanted to be different, she said,
but, my God, we're all imperfects.*

Nights dwindling into days nights spent
repeating tepid argument,
attempt to numb the dread
of climbing every night the stairs
and every night to bed.

In church it's hot in here do you love me?
whispered tersely, surprising him
he wrote back on the bulletin
yet it's hot yes I do
but that afternoon, cold peas left on dinner plates,
he fell asleep with the Sunday news across his face.

He had a container of pens and pencils
on his desk, all without a doubt
inkless and pointless, yet on principle
he would not let her throw them out.

Mornings the omnipotent Take Your Pill
above the bathroom mirror her stare met
(his idea; so she'd not forget)
and she taking a cigarette
and going down, startled eyes like from a mask
to make pancakes, his favorite breakfast.

He drank coffee in precise little sips
and nagged at her for having two cigarettes
already before breakfast.

(cont.)

Every morning, after he left
she went back upstairs
facing the fear in smoke-misted eyes
and disguising it when he came home at night.

I wasn't prepared for this, she said to herself
rubbing Disaster Cream on her face and placing it on the shelf
and going in to meet disaster, now I lay me down
the dread of night the dread of not-night muffled in folds of her gown.

She dreaming, eyes like ticks of the dial
five maids sweeping under the bed,
and examining their dustpans for particles of semen,
laughter menacing from the kitchen.

One night he came in, taking hat from his head,
Get dressed for a party tonight, he said
taking off coat refolding the paper
There'll be lots of food, I won't want much dinner.

She changing clothes time after time
before startled eyes in the mirror
thinking that's not right that's not right
I cannot get my body right
he tying tie with upthrust chin
I think you've had three since I got in
you've got to quit you're getting too thin.

They arrive, clenching say-cheese smiles,
coats thrown in orgy on a bed upstairs
coming down she hears entrance-hall laughter
She looks like a woman whose husband has run dry on her.
And after only nine years of marriage. Wicked whisper.
flat voice calls *Occupied* from the bathroom door
and she must descend to meet and smile once more.

Her husband sitting on the couch,
hands darting up with a point to make
then dropping slowly like uncoiling snakes
Married so long, she knew every grimace
of his party jokes,
every jot and tittle.

(cont.)

Her friends: You're so lucky, since my divorce
all the men I've met are either jerks or fools.
Voice like the whine of a slowly-opened bedroom door,
By the third date I always get bored.
Prick-boredom. Laughter, she remembering the hall
Yes lucky, hands in a dying fall
through wafts of smoke and lengthening ash.

Left alone, she saw him across the room
hands frothing wave-like over the keys
she walked toward him, unsteady on her feet
sound crashing over her
she the flotsam, swept under
Aside, her husband still on the couch,
he said, You're something I've dreamed about
she laughed, he watched her head toss back uneased,
her teeth white as piano keys.

Later upstairs in bed, she wondered
what is this not this not lovers
the Footman having pulled back the covers
and drowning his snickers as they have it
We are such creatures of habit

The teacher said the class was stupid.
The teacher, said the class, was stupid.

The next morning she made guilty pancakes
while he read the paper
and refolded it to be reread
at the office at his desk.

That night, his eyes like two hurts in his face;
I guess the sweetest faces tell the meanest lies.
Her look, blank as a pancake.
Be quiet, I don't care, just be quiet.

She: We never got it right
He: At times it was all right
She: We never got it right

Now the empty nights crawl toward her,
leering up from distended bellies;
Empty nights too crowded full of bodies
to hold a single dream.

Leslie Wells



Debbie Richards

Confession By Telegram

BLESS ME FATHER FOR I HAVE SINNED STOP LATE
LAST NIGHT I STOLE A TRAFFIC SIGN STOP THIS
MORNING A SCHOOLBUS COLLIDED WITH A STATION
WAGON STOP AT THE SAME INTERSECTION FATHER
STOP THIRTEEN PEOPLE DIED STOP

Mark Madigan

Bastards

My old dog lies on the floor.
Chin to the ground. He lifts
His head only high enough to lap
Water from a bowl. He looks at
The world through brown tainted eyes.
Brought to life by hounds
Who coupled like railroads cars,
He makes his own way, now.
He'll never know how much
We have in common.

Mark Madigan

Impasse

Having gone through all the sainted names
We decide to name our child after things
Important to us:
She's for calling him *Marlboro Lights*
I'm more partial to *Canadian Club*.

Mark Madigan

Father

they say a dreamer lives for eternity
but they never mention
we who are slaughtered along your life
down your endless fairy tale path that
you've tried to call
a life.

and you,
dreamer,
father,
have left so many of us dead
in your fantasy life that you
still
keep trying to live.

and make up paint your dreams too
in water colors
that just wash off the world
with the rain from your
eyes.

Anonymous

Shannon

Shannon
silver phantom
of the sky
with eyes
whose touch
we cannot
hold

knows to dance
a river's refrain
sings our dreams
in words with wings

Shannon
silver phantom
of black wine release
will you sing
and dance
me home again?

Randy Kirby





Reverie

As the woman drove to work one day
she saw that the rain
was playing jacks in the street.
She imagined that
she stopped the car, jumped out
and skipped in circles on the wet grass.
Later, arriving at the office,
she walked her fingers up the handrail.

One vacation, the woman soon discovered
that the tide was trying to tag her.
Teasing it, she would give it her heel
and feed it shells.

Away from her job,
the woman jogged nightly for
recreation.
She would remove her glasses
so that she observed only strength
and the posted lights sprouting tendrils.
Sometimes she imagined she could not stop,
and increasing yards away
people could hear her claim,
"I am the wind, I am the wind!"

Kimberly Dodson

Time And Time Again

Those never-ending pages of originality,
An eternal novel sometimes called
A god,
A mystery.
At times when asked to yield a while or so
He balks at rest and journey's on
As if he had somewhere to go.
And yet it seems with little change in pace
There'd be some signs of weariness
Or wrinkles in the face of time,
But never does one find the slightest trace
Of minutes slowing down
But continuing to climb!

Sometimes he's silent like the hermit moss
That creeps along the wall
Then speaks so loud he's heard by all the passersby
Who stop to hear
The warnings of the coming year
And then he lingers like collected dust
On bygone trophies.
His existence is an uninvited must.
He dictates and imperils life,
Controls its very breath.
He mollifies the anxious
And debates with surly death.
He scoffs at immortality,
Keeps captive tangibility
Yet he's a fugitive, himself,
But with no fear, no failing.
Permanence is his wealth.

It appears he's often loitering,
Just whittling away,
Or building castles in the dirt
That crumble day by day.
But he also builds a monarchy
Not threatened by a mutiny
Which he created just to please
The pessimist who stays behind
To look at castles washed to sea.
His pace is steady, dedicated
Never early, not belated.

An interlude of reminiscent retrospect
Has helped reflect some errors by the myriad
And efflorescent periods.
Time has pockets overflowing with the deeds of man
And then without man knowing
He makes manifest that history
And by the aid of modern glass
He mirrors on the distant past
And gives mankind another chance
Time and time again.

Janet Campbell



Cathy Beach



Sandy Middleton

An Occasional Breeze Disturbs The Silence

October; only an occasional
breeze brushing gently against brown leaves
disturbs the silence of day's-end
as with...

nightfall's numb and dormant moon,
or maze of misty starlight—

daytime's vacant airy vault
or cloud-deserted sky—

decomposition; decisions decay
or rot dry desire.

Ron Baker, Shannon Elder

Your Signature

your signature lies softly
inscribed on the paper legacies
of my soul a warm place
amidst pillows and perfumed
cushions
were it ever to be removed
the agony of that tear
would cause sudden death
the heart would well so
that I could not breathe
I would choke without
your soft hands to caress
the place.

Ann Lindsey

Love

When I was eleven, I carved out
My first pumpkin. I called her Eve.
Candlelight flickered through
Her sharply cut eyes and mouth.
But now, the eyes are laced with soot;
The mouth is shriveled,
And the smile's turned sour.
The candle's gone out, too.

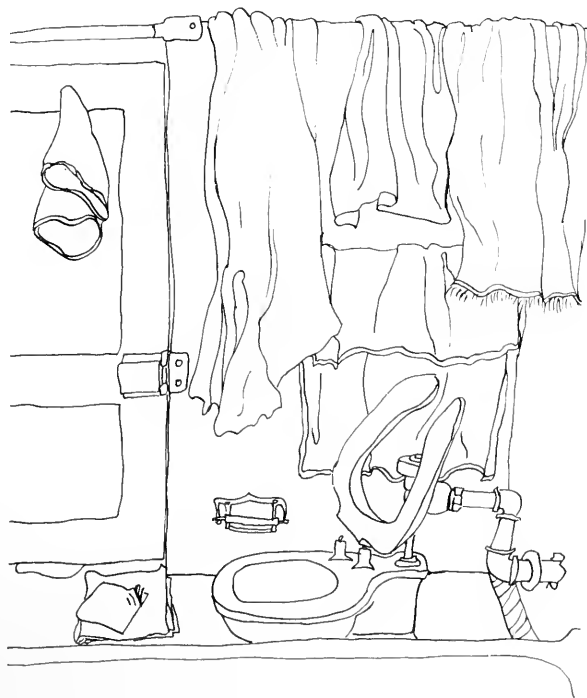
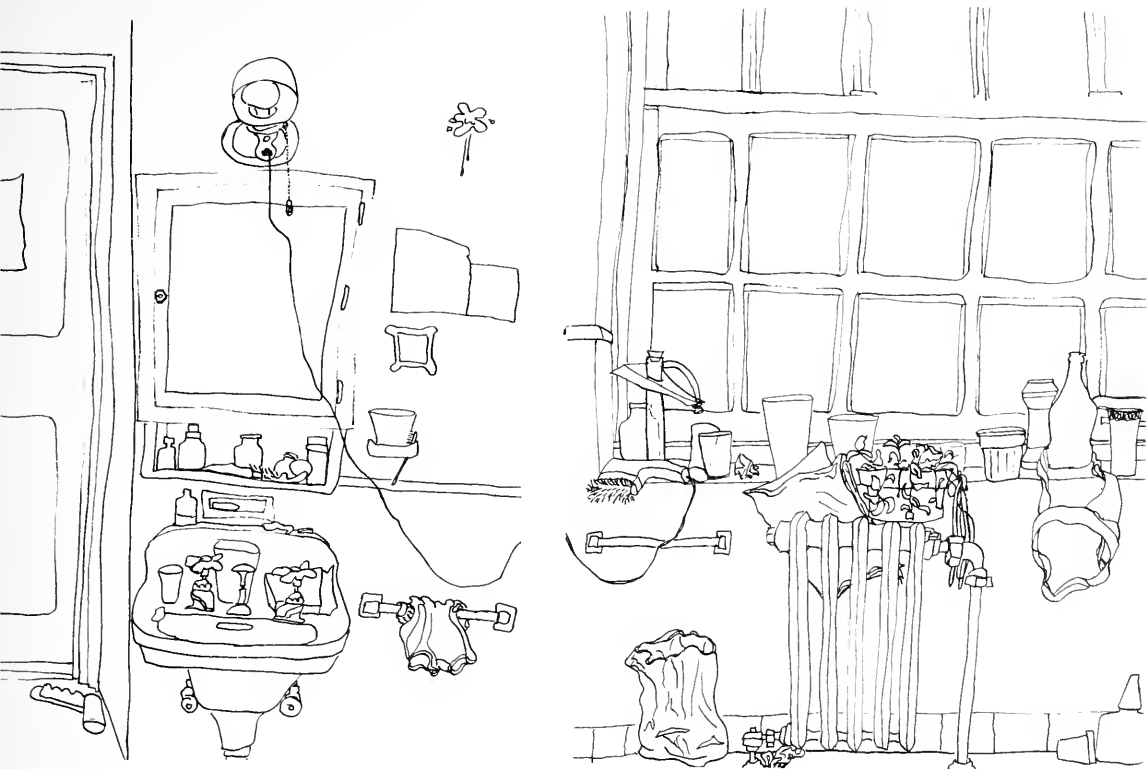
Mark Madigan

Other People's Glasses

They sit alone on a table, so you
Pick them up. You try them on.
The view is so foggy from here, you say.
You take them off and lay them down again.
Your eyes hurt.

Would you have it any different:
Would you look through somebody else's glasses
And see the view that they see?
And see the you that they see?
Your eyes would hurt. Worse.

Mark Madigan





I Am In The Season

I am in the season when
I can't meet people's eyes.
Dear____, my letters all begin
Fineandyou? Fine I am fine.
My mother saying whats the matter
cracking eggs into the skillet
looking anxiously over her shoulder
—Do you know what you are going to do?

I could form half of a Mister and Miseries
I could be hit while crossing the street
could go to work in the big city
and become a world-famous secretary.

There are so many things you could do,
swirling the crackling yolks with a fork
Why not teach piano?
Lots of good money in that sort of work.

I could be the first person
ever to murder a sleeping nun.

My mother regulating water
the children clamoring for their bath
You'd economize by staying here
we'd be glad to have you back

...many ways to make myself known
I could marry a future president,
wind up filing names in dusty cabinets
and going home to hot and cold.

Leslie Wells

The Moths

I knew that it was Autumn when I found
dead moths. Like Havisham they wore, though frayed
and yellowed by an age of waiting, gowns
which had a use no longer. Yes, but they
had been deserted afterwards, the night
that they, forever bound by words and rings
to one who didn't stay to strip the white
and seal the promise with an act, lived since:
the night repeated every night as they,
impatient brides and maidens, fluttered round
a lone, bare light bulb or a single flame
and watched the slow decaying of their gowns.
I knew, yes, when I saw them still, at day,
that also hope, on which they lived, decayed.

Amy R. Sanderson



Karen Noss



Jeanine Hewitt

A Vague Sense Of This or That

the clean, white bone of a cigarette,
rendered again and again
into ceremonial ash,
resembles the short ends of your fingers
as they burn across the body of memory.

the five minutes burn down to this;
an explanation of the past is an acceptance of the loss.

a splinter of the frozen night
knives through the newness of passion's peace.
sleep shivers away sleep.
now the night's communication - imprinted napkins,
talk taken out with the morning's trash...
coffees cool;
residue.

a quiet jet drifts past
the wastes of the west,
destined for the east—
where east is east is east...

rain and trees in mists of fog and rain,
and calm beneath a palm-haven,
as rays of last light are sifted in the heavy air,
colors arc and glow - suspended.
and damp as wet warmth as smother swamp and hidden lair,
rainbows fade away back into rain.

sigh off smoke and crush out the butt of a bad joke;
keep the ashtray clean.

light up a new direction,
as though a back-alley's moment
could move on without waiting
for remorse and regret to meet-
passing back and forth
the offer to share a last cigarette.

Shannon Elder

The Prisoner

The prisoner awoke in his bed of straw to the sound of distant gunfire. Although his hands were tied he was not uncomfortable. His father would probably laugh at the way he had let this American family capture him, but then Papa never did understand this war anyway. These Americans were as strange as all foreigners seemed. But they would soon all be driven from his homeland soil.

The sound of a woman's voice brought him back from his thoughts. "Here are some eggs and fresh milk, please eat." This was the girl they called Amy. maybe it was their kindness to him that he found strange, or was it their genuine concern for each other that made them seem different. But, it really didn't matter for they would soon be found and exterminated. The barn had provided adequate shelter against the cold March winds and the roof had proved invaluable in the freezing rains. But, it would be like a silken tapestry against the barrage of bullets his countrymen would deliver. Why did these foolish people persist in hiding, it would mean their death. This family had already gotten lucky once, when a passing group of soldiers had fired into the barn with such ferocity that it had chilled him where he sat. And yet, the small ones shielded by their parents lives didn't utter a sound. The soldiers had marched on without checking the barn and luckily the Americans had chosen not to exchange any rounds. So they had extended their lives by a matter of hours. Perhaps these people were not aware of how The Leader dealt with insolence. Oh, but he knew. Many times he had witnessed the executions that were necessary to appease The Leader. Had he not been present when they shot Lorraine? Sweet Lorraine...But that was almost three years ago and...The child's voice again woke him from his thoughts. "They call me David," was still echoing in his head as he glanced into the boy's nervous brown eyes. The boy selfconsciously withdrew his outstretched hand as he realized the prisoner's hands were bound. Sensing the hurt the boy felt, due to his silence the prisoner answered "I am Frederic." "Hello, Fred" the boy replied somewhat questioningly. "Frederic!" corrected the prisoner but this came out a little harsh and more proudly than intended and the child scurried to his father's side.

What was the driving force behind this family that made them think they could hold up in this barn with only a few puny rifles and one lowly hand grenade? Or did they realize that death was inevitable and they were showing false bravery, no, the honesty was there the bravery wasn't false. They actually believed in their cause, it must be this strong belief that preserved their sanity. He had believed in something once but that was long ago and before The Leader. Now, things were different and the dissension in his country was overwhelming. There was The Leader and his devoted followers and those opposed such as the foreigners fighting for their lives, and those like his father who thought it all "tragic" but were passive. These were the people he found gutless, those not willing to take an active stand. Arguments with his father kept coming back to him in his dreams as he slept. His father had insisted it was *he* and not his son who was taking a stand. "For it was easy," he said, "to follow a maniac, to *oppose* him showed courage."

(cont.)



Debra L.S. Welch



Sandra Hall

The man's voice broke the silence "Fred buddy, here comes your friends." As Frederic peered through a crack in the faded red siding he could make out a small exploration party, heavily armed. Which could only mean that they knew the barn was occupied with the enemy. By the size of the group he knew that they realized it was only one family. They had probably been observed gathering greens or water. Something caught his eye to the left of the group and shifting his gaze through a knothole he spied a bright red uniform, heavily brassed. The black felt hat and crown of red plumage gave away the identity of The Leader, safely behind his two warlords. He is here to prove his bravery thought Frederic. He will have his men execute his family and then he will play it all up like it was due to his personal valor.

"Surrender!" shouted The Leader, "Or you will be killed." Frederic watched the Americans release their safeties on their rifles and knew they had no intentions of giving up. Perhaps, he thought, David's father had also observed the black blindfolds draped over the warlords shoulder. These were saved for special executions before the eyes of high ranking officials. "Let me go" Frederic blurted out as a rush of emotion filled every pore in his body. "Cut me loose." David's father hesitated and then did as the prisoner asked. As his hands came free he grasped one in a handshake as he said "Call me Johnny" in a voice even more friendly than Frederic had imagined possible and a strange warmth flowed up his arm and into his soul before he released the grip. "Frederic" was his conditioned reply. He then shouted out "Almighty Leader, I am Frederic, one of your own." He stood up to show his uniform and reached for his hat. "Come forward, soldier" was the shouted reply. As Frederic turned he looked at the family and a shudder started at his knees and seemed to envelope his every movement. The intense look of fear seemed to creep even into the baby's eyes. But this was over-shadowed by the sheer terror outlined in the mother's face. Johnny was casually flipping the grenade from hand to hand. "How much time, after it is triggered?" asked Frederic. "Eleven seconds" Johnny answered without expression.

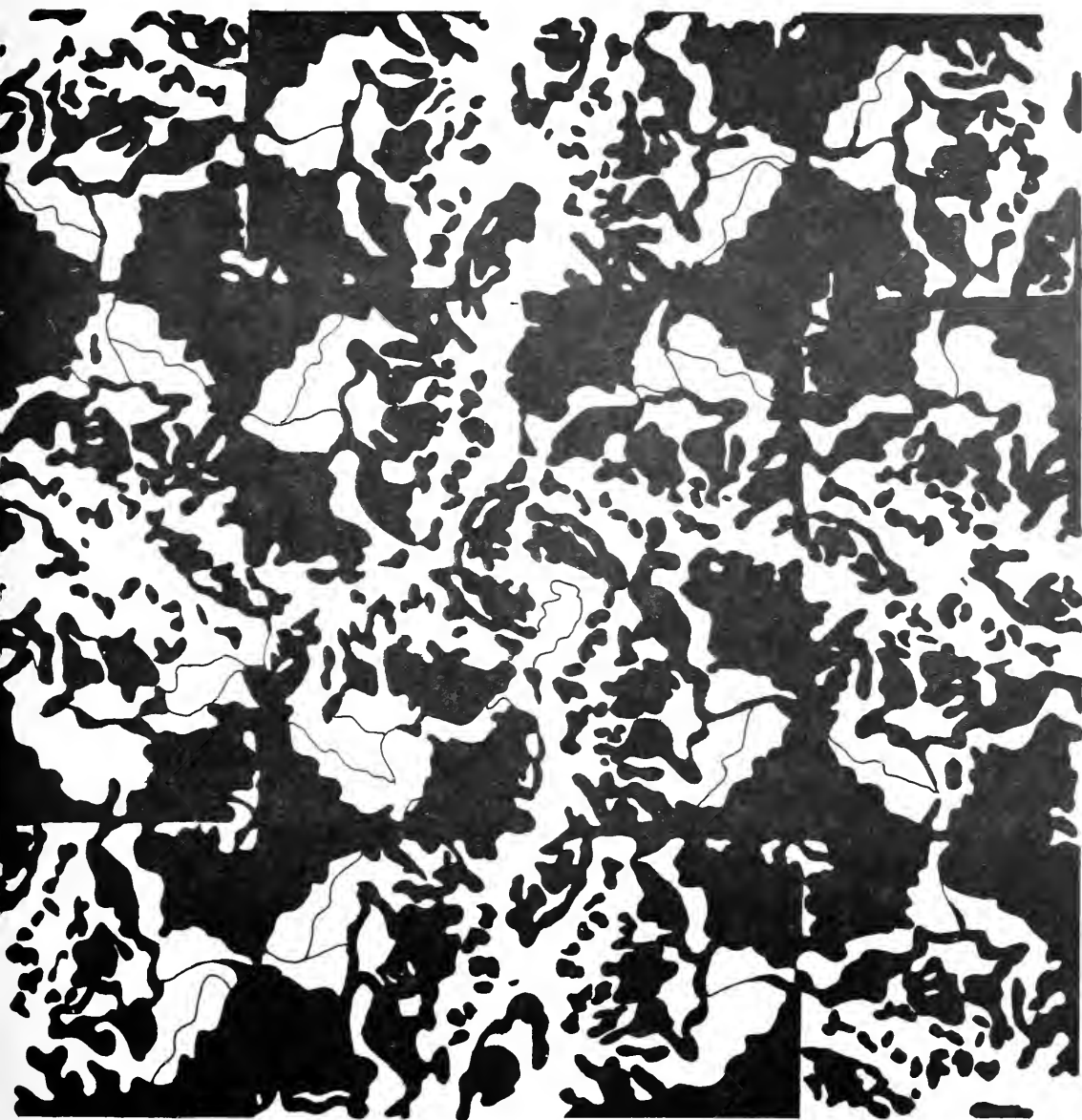
Before walking out, Frederic said, "Good Luck and I wish you happiness." Then placing the grenade in his pants he pulled out the ring, dropped it by the barn door and with his hand upraised in a salute he walked toward The Leader. Looking into his eyes he quietly spoke "They call me Fred," then he embraced The Leader as he closed his eyes.

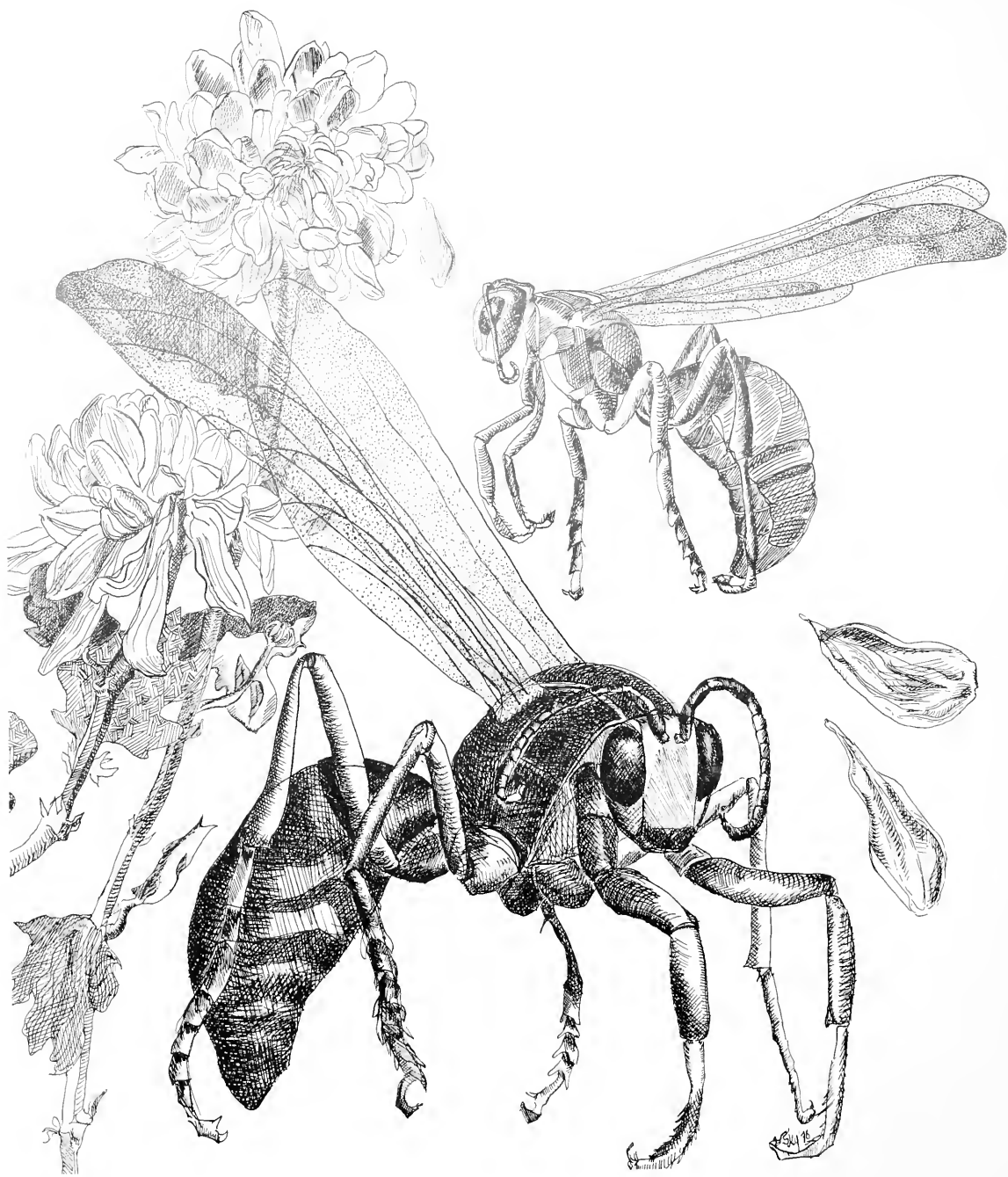
Peter Back

The Turtledoves

The eyes of the turtledoves meet
And instantly know their sparks,
But the tinder is hidden.
One flying, the other roosting,
One singing, the other brooding,
One searching, the other longing:
Four wings fluttering in different directions.
Having drawn near with a mingling of feathers,
Gradually they drift apart with the wind,
Neither realizing the distance traveled,
'Til at last they view each other through panes of glass,
Cooing and clucking to themselves.

Robert Graves





She's Here Again

she's here again.
the muggy, sweaty nights are bringing her back,
the kind of night when the sheets stick to your back
and those moths beat at your screen.
but then

she's slipped out somehow
maybe under the door
from that back bedroom of my mind.
she's a

city worn woman
scarred by perpetual bruises against her,
still so clear.
everything about her scored into my mind
so that nothing's forgotten
and brought back to memory in a summer lightening flash
of pain,
while

I looked out my window that long ago afternoon
and saw her, face heavy with confusion and pain
as she struggled across that city street
carrying her life in a brown paper bag
trying to braid her way through the traffic,
no one caring
so that when the bus came pouring down at her
it wouldn't even slow to let her cross
and she had to run.

Anonymous

Save It For A Rainy Day

The wind rapped upon my window-unwanted and
desolate.
I looked on with unparalleled digression
Something in the woodwork eating its way out
Faded words of the past invade my solitude
Trapped between something felt and something I am
I missed the emotion as it seeped into the hurt
There beneath the pool of understanding
Reflecting back into my face.
Glowing as a fire upon a darkened room
Growing faster while the coals of lingering words
Warm the glow which fills the room
Rearranging, building until the fire reaches the stars
Intertwined they shine and each enjoys
A sparking of the very same.
The light invadingly visits my room
Painting the walls, floors, and all objects within
And I'm glad I had my shade up for
Living within me to this day is that
Single ray of light.

John Patrick Thompson

Aftermath

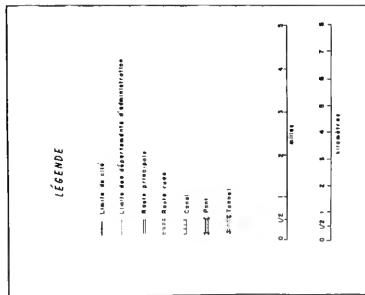
Your rounded face in glee once carved
with full ripe jowls and star-shaped eyes
is sinking low each passing night
as candles burn the dark inside.

Your place upon a front door step
and there beside a welcome mat
intends refuge though children flee-
your leering face is all but jest.

Some creature deep within you moans
with children's threats to do you in;
passed by then busted on the stone
your leering face, now vanquished, molds.

Ann Lindsey

P A R I S



Christmas Spirits

A Tale

SCENE 1: A snowy forest. Music in background is ethereal in nature, mysterious, lighthearted and "Elfish," from which snatches of carols can be discerned. The entire set is oversized, as if those to be peopling the stage were, in relation to the set, about 1' tall (i.e.--the average height would probably be 5'6", to be scaled down to about 1'; therefore, 1'=2" scale). In addition to the bottoms of tree trunks to be visible upstage, there should be a couple of huge leaves (about 3' in length) and a couple of acorns (about 8" in diameter) poking out from the snow, as well as a branch that has fallen in such a way as to make a rainbow-shaped archway stage right. Just up left of center is a stump upon which people can stand. Lights should have a dusky, moonlight feeling, with barely visible shadows criss-crossed on stage, suggesting branches overhead.

As the lights come up we discover the seven Sprites. They are slim, lithe, and dainty, and they are graceful in a very natural way, with no dancey gestures or ballet arms, but having instead a crisp, energetic fluidity of movement. They are dressed in browns and would be camouflaged if not for the snow. Their costumes should be uniform (a sort of Peter Pan prototype) but each Sprite should have a different pair of shoes and a different hairstyle. (Shoes could range from ballet slippers to clogs to regular elf shoes to leather soles with thongs around the ankles, etc.; but all must be able to have been made by them. Hairstyles should be nothing curled or set, but long and kinked; medium length and teased to stand out; a bun; braided in several braids; a regular pixie; etc.) Each Sprite also has a tiny bell attached to his or her left wrist. The noise made must be very small, and each bell must have a distinctly different tone.

The Sprites are engaged in a mime dance. Each one is making a Christmas Confection, which is their word for a Christmas feeling inside oneself, since Sprites have no need for food, but live on love. One sprite is making Anticipations, one is making Joys, one Surprises, one Peace-on-Earths, one Contented Sighs, one Spirits-of-Giving, and one Goodwills. They are standing in place as they make these. The music fades and is barely audible throughout the scene.

Sprite 1: How many Anticipations have you made in the last hour? You're so slow.

Sprite 2: (Deep in almost comical concentration) Ten.

Sprite 1: TEN? Why, I've made 25 Surprises in the last hour, and all the other sprites are busy --
(to another Sprite) I see in this pile 32 Contented Sighs--

(cont.)

Sprite 3: What would Christmas be without Contented Sighs?

Sprite 4: I've made 37 Joys--

Sprite 5: And I 45 Peace-on-Earths!

Sprite 6: 39 Spirits-of-Giving for me!

Sprite 7: And 43 Goodwills, all ready to be given away!

Surprise: Well, tonight is Christmas Eve, so you'd best hurry. What would happen if we didn't make enough Christmas Spirit for the entire forest? And Anticipation is one of the most important--why, without Anticipation, my Surprises will be ruined!

Anticipation: I only have 5 more to go! (*Anticipation continues to work through the next bit.*)

Contented Sighs: Now, now, don't fuss. We've worked all week on our gifts, and there's one for everyone.

Joy: One of each for every elf, gnome, fairy, and sprite in the forest.

Peace: So everyone will have each of the Seven Christmas Confections, enough deliciousness to last all year!

Giving: Do you know what I have been told? I have heard that in the world outside our forest, human sprites eat Christmas food and call these "Confections," too!

Goodwill: Why, how foolish! While we lucky woodland sprites need no food, but only our own gifts which we make and exchange: Anticipation, Surprise, Contented Sighs, Joy, Peace-on-Earth, Spirit-of-Giving, and Goodwill. (*s/he counts them off on fingers as they are said, and the appropriate Sprite strikes a pose for a second when his/her gift is called.*)

Peace: But remember each of us must save Seven of our own Confections, so that the seven of us can exchange gifts; I, for example, will give each of you a Spirit-of-Giving..that makes...(he counts the others very clearly, but to himself) yes, six--which leaves one for me to keep!

Joy: And I will save 7 Joys--one for each of you and one for me!

(cont.)

Contented Sighs: But what of the human sprites? What do they give for Christmas gifts?

Giving: (Downstage) Human sprites give gifts that you can hold in your hand--things that can be wrapped up in paper and tied with a bow. Then do you know what they do? *(All but Anticipation have gathered around as if he were a story-teller, and they shake their heads "no" eagerly.)* They cut down a tree and place it inside their homes, and they put the presents under it until Christmas morning! *(All laugh.)*

Goodwill: But if the human sprites give gifts to be passed by hand, from where do they get their Christmas Spirit?

Givin: Ah, this is where we woodland sprites are different from them--for although the human sprites need each other to be happy, their Christmas Spirit must come from within themselves. No one can make it for them; it must be born within their own hearts.

Surprise: You mean they cannot share their Christmas Spirit?

Giving: They can share it, yes, but not in the same way we do--a human sprite can only share his Christmas Spirit by showing someone else his own.

Anticipation: (Standing and brushing his hands together to indicate completion of his task) I'm finished!

(All rush to see. In the bustle of ad libs, a fairy enters. Being a fairy and not a sprite, she is different in quality from the others, and dances in classical Ballet form. As she enters, dancing, the music changes--perhaps "Afternoon of a Faun" by Debussy--and a jazzy, very jaunty spot should follow her, almost like a glow. The Sprites join her in dance, contrasting their crisp, youthful modern dance style with her graceful Ballet (although she, too, retains a youthful vivacity). In texture, too, she is different from them; her costume should be completely sheer and she should wear flesh-colored body tights with spaghetti straps. Arms should be bare. The material should flow as she moves, and should accentuate her body, not in a sexual way, but very simply and naturally. The comparison is as if the sprites were earth and she were air. The whole effect of all the dances should be one of a celebration of life. When the dance is over, the fairy nimbly leaps onto the stump, and speaks to the others in a boyish yet genuine voice, like that of a tomboy who will someday be a beautiful woman.)

Ishaeel: Listen now, Sprites, for I bring news of great importance. I have just returned from the world outside our forest, and I come to ask you a great favor. *(Hub-bub)* There is another outside our realm who very badly needs some of our precious Christmas Spirit...*(More Hub-bub)*

Peace: But we have made only enough for those in the forest!

Anticipation: That's true! And for each other, of course.

Joy: Why, what if we didn't have enough for everyone? And there is no time to make more, for we must begin to deliver--it's Christmas Eve!

(cont.)

Ishaeel: There is one more thing I must tell you. (*Silence.*) The one in need of your help is a human sprite.

Contented Sighs: A human sprite? But human sprites cannot get their Christmas Spirit that way!

Surprise: They must create their own--within their own hearts!

Ishaeel: They cannot give it to each other, for they lack the power--but we, with our woodland magic, can give it to them.

Goodwill: But we have made only enough for the forest and each other--surely you will not ask us to take from our own families for one not of our kind?

Ishaeel: Of course not; but isn't there just one more person that you've all forgotten for whom you have each made a gift?

Giving: Certainly not! I have made one Spirit-of-Giving for everyone in the forest, one for each of my 6 fellow Sprites, and one for m-- (*He starts to say "me" and cuts himself off. All are comitely silent. Giving tries to whistle nonchalantly and creep away, but is stopped by another Sprite.*)

Ishaeel: Yes, one for you. Each of you has one Christmas Confection that can be given away without any of your friends or family missing it, and that is the one you have saved for yourself. I will leave you now to make your decision; but I remind you that Christmas is a huge circle, made of all the creatures who believe in the power of smiles, and if one of these creatures is unhappy, the circle is that much smaller for everyone. (*She begins to dance away, and Giving speaks up.*)

Giving: *Ishaeel?* (*She stops; he speaks after some hesitation.*) Where might we find this human sprite?

Ishaeel: (*Smiling*) Shall I take you to her? (*All nod eagerly.*) Come then, follow me! (*She makes a leap and dances off the stage; the others fall in behind her, each gathering up his or her "gifts" before dancing off.*)

SCENE II: The "human sprite's" bedroom. Again, everything is in 1'=2" scale. Stage left the foot of her bed is visible, the head of the bed being off stage left, with mounds of bedspread coming down. It would be about 12' to the top of the mattress, representing a bed 2' high. Up stage right is a nightstand, probably about 3' high in real life, in any case rising high enough for the tope to be obscured. A warm golden glow of light comes from this area as if there were a candle or a hurricane lamp lit on the table. A hobbyhorse (the bottom half of one) is up center, and a ball on the floor at its feet (about 4'6" in diameter to represent a "real" ball 9" in diameter).

The Sprites enter cautiously from stage right. The first Sprite to enter, Anticipation, is laden with mountain-climbing equipment--a long rope with knots tied in it, spaced for climbing, and a pick. Each Sprite also carries a burlap-type sack with a shoulder strap, the sack stuffed so as to appear to contain only one item, each Sprite's Christmas Confection. They stop and gaze about.

(*cont.*)

Surprise: (beckoning all as if for a secret, whispering) The human sprites are very large! (all roll their eyes impatiently.)

Contented Sighs: For Heaven's sake, we can see that.

Joy: Has everyone got his gift?

Peace: Yes, right here! (All check in their sacks and nod affirmation.)

Goodwill: Is she up there?

Giving: Yes. How ever will we get up so high?

Anticipation: We have this! (All Sprites run to the bed. Ad libs throughout this bit. Anticipation puts down his/her pick, which should be somewhat large and heavy for him/her, and after a couple of tries, throws the rope high enough to go over the edge of the mattress onto the top of the bed. The bed is constructed so as to accommodate a person hidden below the surface of the mattress who will attach the rope so they can climb up. Anticipation tests the rope and brushes his hands together in his characteristic gesture.) All ready! Well, who wants to go first?

Giving: (After a silence) I suppose I should--this was my idea. (s/he begins to climb up. The others watch until s/he disappears over the mattress. They remove their bags and begin to look about.)

Joy: So this is how a human sprite lives? It is all very curious.

Surprise: Indeed, it is. What do you suppose this is, for example? (s/he tentatively pokes at the ball.)

Peace: Perhaps it is a berry of some strange bush.

Anticipation: And how ever did they get this great horse to stand so still?

Goodwill: (venturing nearer) But that is not a real horse--it is made of wood. Do you know what I think?

All: No, what? (etc.)

(cont.)

Goodwill: I think these are the human sprite's toys!

Contented Sighs: Why of course! And they are not unlike the toys we have in our own homes in the roots of the oak tree!

Peace: Perhaps we are not so very different from each other after all. *(They begin to explore more--one climbing around the hobby horse, one jumping to see what is on the table top, one running around the table legs, and the other three trying in vain to roll the huge ball. Giving clamors back down.)*

Giving: Hello! *(They stop and gather around him.)* All is well up there, but you must hurry for it will soon be morning! *(All Sprites pick up their bags and scurry up the rope.)*

Giving: (soliloquizing) It certainly is strange, but now that I have given away my Spirit-of-Giving, I feel as if I have more than ever. But that can't be, can it? Or maybe it can...yes, maybe that's what Christmas Spirit is all about--not giving away something you have plenty of, but giving away something of your very own, because you love someone enough to want them to have it. And that's why everyone is so happy inside--the more you give, the more your happiness grows. And the more you love, the more you are loved. *(The others are returning one by one. Their bags are empty)* Carols can be heard very faintly in the background.) Have you all done your jobs?

All: Yes! *(etc.)*

Giving: Come along then. We must leave; it's almost Christmas Day!

(All scurry out laughing, leaving behind the pick and the rope. Blackout. The carols rise and continue to play throughout the set change.)

SCENE III: A living room. Christmas Morning. The preceding carols (which were instrumental) fade out, and as the lights come up (bright morning lights), church bells begin to ring. Voices singing "We Wish You a Merry Christmas" begin. The room is charming and timeless--furnished a' la the 1850's, and having the ability to be then or now. The Christmas tree is the dominant feature; it is large and decorated beautifully, but completely old fashioned--decorations of paper and foil, fruit and candy canes; fire laws will probably preclude the use of candles, but a clever "techie" can arrange the tiny yellow fairy lights to be positioned over candles to give the impression. Also included should be a sofa, a sideboard, coffee table, a hooked-rug, a fireplace, and a window.

As the lights come up, the Mother and Father are discovered arranging presents under the tree.

Father: The carolers are about early this morning.

Mother: Everything looks lovely-I don't know what else we can do to cheer her up-a child her age depressed on Christmas Eve.

(cont.)

Father: Well, maybe she'll feel better this morning. There's something about Christmas Day that lifts everyone's spirits. *(Enter Sarah. She is about 8 or 9 years old, and is anything but depressed. She bounces into the room and runs to her parents.)*

Sarah: Good morning, Mother! Good morning, Father! Merry Christmas!

Mother and Father: *(Unsure sidelong glances)* Good morning, Sarah. Merry Christmas to you, too!

Sarah: *(Kneeling on sofa and looking out window)* Isn't it a beautiful morning? I could tell it was Christmas as soon as I woke up!

Mother: How could you tell?

Sarah: Well, it just *felt* like Christmas! I woke up and heard the church bells, and I wanted to say "Merry Christmas" to everyone. And you know, it's funny, but I dreamed of bells last night.

Father: *(Smiling; sitting on sofa)* Did you?

Sarah: Yes; the most beautiful bells I've ever heard. They were telling a story, but I can't remember much of it, except that I was in a forest, and there was lots of laughter. The story was about Christmas, and the bells were telling me what Christmas was all about. There weren't really any words, but I remember one thing--I kept hearing over and over, "The love in your heart wasn't put there to stay; love isn't love til you give it away." *(She has moved downstage; she turns to look at her parents)* Is that right?

Mother: That's exactly right.

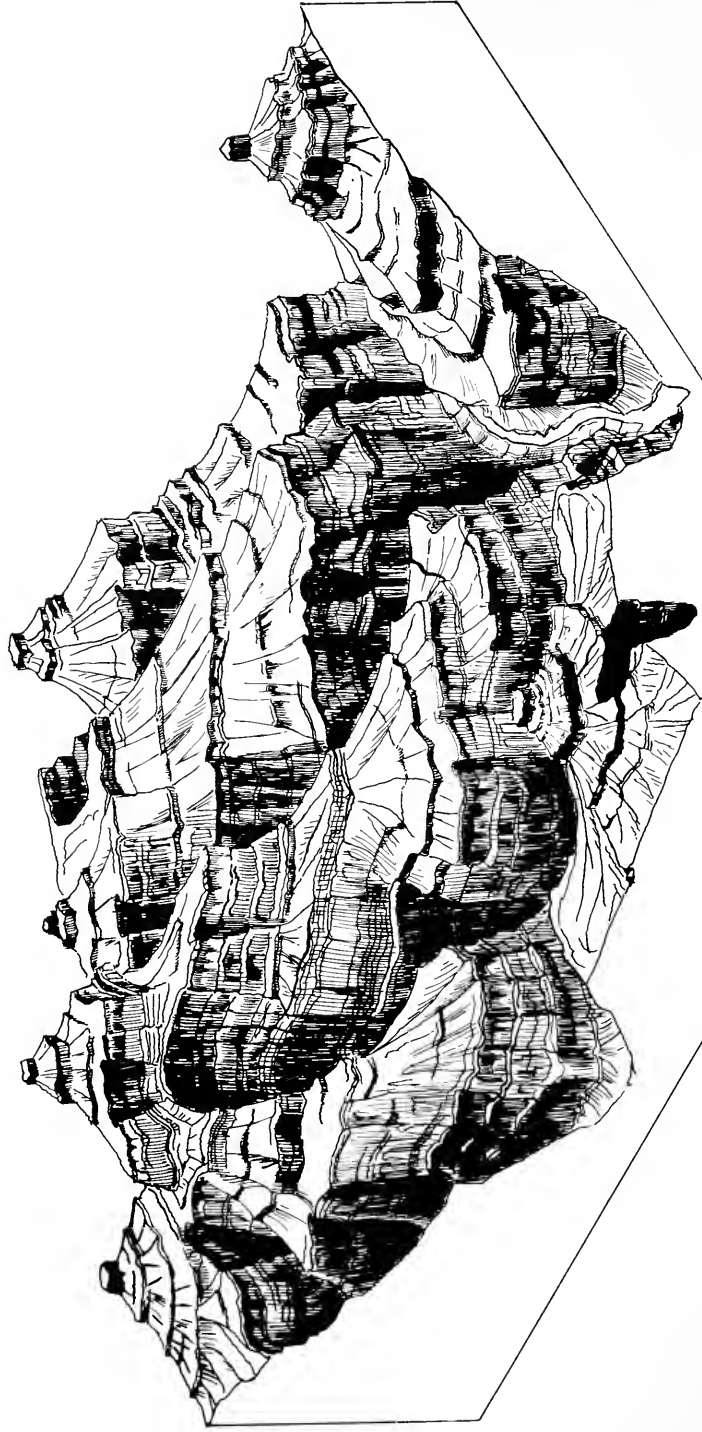
Sarah: And you know what else? This morning I found this funny little tool, and this string tied to my bed-post. Is this part of my Christmas present? *(All laugh)*

(He turns and all three go to the tree and begin to exchange and unwrap presents. As Sarah speaks her last line, the Sprites enter from the rear of the house. They are singing very softly with the still-playing tape, now instrumental, of "We Wish You a Merry Christmas." At first, in the back, it must be so soft that only those immediately beside them can hear them. As they work their way down the aisles they can become louder, and can ring their wrist-bells more noticeably. This must be like a free-style dance. As this is happening, the lights on stage are dimming to just an inkie on the Christmas tree. As soon as the first Sprite reaches the front of the house, light must come up on the area in front of the apron where they are gathering. When about four of the seven have reached the front, the same faint spot from the first scene picks up Ishaeel at the back of the house, audience left. She will dance down the aisle and to the front where the Sprites will join her, falling in behind her as she dances up the other aisle and out the back, all calling "Merry Christmas" as they go.)

Tutt Stapp



GRANITE GORGE



Montine Jordan

Voyager

Little concern for port of origin is shown,
The voyager's sails search the mists
For their destination, watchful of shoals and shallows.
The salt sprays him with the force of voices:
Live for today, forget all else, dock here,
For this port is as good as another;
Here's plenty to fondle, ample to drink.
Imbibe deeply and be at peace
(Until your pockets become void).
Continue roaming the teeming brine,
From murmuring hands of ancient giants
Comes the resounding summons;
And though the wanderer climbs their volumes,
Only murky gloom is encountered.
Rumbling, groaning, the timbers bear for haven.

Robert Graves

Shalom; Goodbye

I

What can I say we shared?
What of our lives but our loneliness, our grief,
an abyss to be filled?
The external things that mattered most to each
we had least in common,
perhaps.

It doesn't matter.
The vows of friendship and loyalty
have not been broken.

They lay,
like special toys of childhood,
in some neglected corner; we see
with numbing sorrow
that they have no relevance to today.

II

A day at a time very quickly is a year
and years go by.
There will be others, as close or closer,
other friends, other days, other years.
There are moments we try to grasp and carry with us
as we are driven on,
though there is much we seem to lose:
What are you?

I don't know you.

III

There you are:
so familiar to my eyes,
and a stranger to my heart.
But it's all right, I understand;
because the you I needed then
is still inside me.
You have changed, but I have kept you.
I hold the part of you I loved.

What I lost of myself
you'll hold safely
and keep from me
so it, too, may never change.

Amy R. Sanderson



Mary Zimmerman

